

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001631

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, IO, PRM AND DRL  
LABOR FOR ILAB  
USCINCPAC FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/02

TAGS: [PREF](#) [ELAB](#) [BG](#) [BM](#) [UNDP](#) [UNHCR](#)

SUBJECT: UNHCR CONTINUES TO PRESS BURMA ON FORCED LABOR IN  
NORTHERN RAKHINE STATE

REF: A. (A) DHAKA 3468

[1](#)B. (B) RANGOON 1059

Classified By: DCM Ron McMullen. Reason: 1.5 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: UNHCR says that forced labor continues in northern Rakhine State, but maintains that there has been no significant new outflow of refugees from Burma. According to UNHCR's Resident Representative, he has pressed the government hard regarding forced labor, but may need additional support to bring the practice to an end. End Summary.

#### No New Refugees

[1](#)2. (C) UNHCR's Resident Representative Rajiv Kapur told Poloff that there had no significant recent outflow of refugees from northern Rakhine State. UNHCR monitors the populations in Rohingya Muslim villages in the area and had found no change. He has also talked to the UNHCR office in Bangladesh. According to Kapur, both offices agreed that the recent crowds of Rohingya Muslims that had gathered in Teknaf, Bangladesh were mostly illegal Burmese migrants who had fled the Bangladesh army's recent campaigns against crime. Apparently, the migrants felt safer presenting themselves as recent refugees than as long-term illegal migrants.

#### Forced Labor

[1](#)3. (C) Kapur said that he continued to press the government hard regarding forced labor in northern Rakhine State. In general, the situation had improved. Forced labor was down to very low levels in three of the four townships in which UNHCR operates. The army, military intelligence, and the township peace and development committees have sworn off the use of forced labor, Kapur stated. However, the NASAKA (Burmese border police) commander in Maungdaw North continued to make demands for forced labor. Altogether, there were twenty incidents of forced labor in Maungdaw North in October affecting 68 percent of that township's 32 villages. Kapur said that he had raised the NASAKA Commander's behavior with the government (reftel B) to no effect, and, in early December, warned Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Maung Win that the GOB was inviting an adverse reaction from the international community by its failure to act. According to Kapur, the meeting was tense, but KMW promised to "try" to have the problem addressed "to the extent he could." However, he cautioned Kapur that the GOB's cooperation with UNHCR could be affected, "if there was a mixing of mandates among UN agencies."

#### UNDP's Resident Representative

[1](#)4. (C) Kapur recommended that the USG pay special attention to the selection of the new UNDP Resident Coordinator for Burma. The right person, he said, could ensure that all UN agencies played a role in monitoring human rights abuses, something most were reluctant to do now. He had found that you could get a reaction from the government, if you were consistent, objective, and firm. With UN agencies now establishing an almost nationwide presence, they could play a significant role, given the right leadership. According to Kapur, the Resident Coordinator's position had already been advertised and the selection would likely be made before February.

#### Comment and Action Recommendations

[1](#)5. (C) The UN agencies now are in a position to do far more on human rights than they have to date. Many are establishing programs in border regions inhabited by ethnic minorities and can play a role in bringing human rights abuses to the attention of the SPDC leadership. Such reports may not get immediate action, but they will at least ensure that the SPDC can no longer pretend to be ignorant of the problems or dismiss them as the fabrications of opposition groups. Motivating the UN agencies to play a role in protecting human rights, however, will require the right person as UNDP's resident coordinator. We recommend that the

Department give this some attention and, if we have a candidate that can really do the job here, put him or her forward.

16. (C) As for Kapur's points on forced labor, he will need support. We have weighed in with Khin Nyunt, and will raise the issue again. Other funders of UNHCR's program, however, should speak up as well.  
Martinez